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## District to help ex-convicts readjust

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By Sterling Meyers - The District's faith community is working with the D.C. government on a program to help the roughly 2,000 residents returning from prison every year.

The program — called 40 Days of Reentry — began last week in churches across the city and is in partnership with the city's Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency.

"Government is capable of lowering rates of recidivism," said Leonard Sipes Jr., a spokesman for the city agency. "But through the faith community ... those reductions can be multiplied significantly. Individuals need a moral compass."

Events throughout February will link former inmates with support programs, mentors, educational programs and other services.

One of programs was for mentoring children of the incarcerated. A Feb. 23 program at the Emery Recreation Center, on Georgia Avenue Northwest, will focus on helping women who were incarcerated.

Mr. Sipes said such programs also help taxpayers by keeping former inmates from returning to prison.

Justice Department figures show that about 25 percent of former inmates return to U.S. prisons.

"The programs not only protect society, but also lessen the tax burden by not having to supervise these individuals in the future, or for that matter, build additional prison space," Mr. Sipes said.

He said a mosque, a church or a synagogue can help people once influenced by gangs and crews.

The Rev. Donald Isaac, executive director for East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership, said finding jobs and homes for former inmates is "paramount to success."

He also said the churches "offer hope and encouragement."

Among the churches participating are Peace Baptist Church in Northeast, Campbell AME Church in Southeast, Upper Room Baptist Church in Northeast, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Northwest, and Metropolitan AME Church in Northwest.

Mr. Isaac said Paul Trantham, an inmate from 1994 to 2003, has been part of the city programs for about the past four years and is now mentoring.

"I left the past in the past and moved forward," Mr. Trantham said. He was mentored, landed a job, worked up to managerial positions, now sings in the church choir and holds the keys to his church. Mr. Trantham encourages former inmates to join a church.

"The church is there to pick you up, lift you up and encourage you," he said. "Me being incarcerated, and having a record — certain individuals in the church were aware of that. I felt so honored that people trusted me after I opened up."

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